

Current view into cemetery from Somerville Avenue, the American Elm is thought to be a centennial tree



As the only pre-20th century burial ground in the City, Milk Row Cemetery contains a significant Civil War Soldiers Monument as well as tombs and graves of prominent citizens of Somerville. The site on Somerville Avenue was founded in 1804 when Samuel Tufts sold some of his farmland for one dollar to “Timothy Tufts, Esq., Nathaniel Hawkins, Esq., Samuel Kent, Samuel Shed, and John Stone, yeomen, all of said Charlestown, and their associates . . . on the express condition that the same be improved for no other purpose than for a burying place.”

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

The street name “Milk Row,” now Somerville Avenue, was likely derived from the dairy businesses of the area and the use of the route for transport of dairy products. On nearby Spring Hill were located many dairy farm sites of early Charlestown residents. Milk Row was thought to be the route taken by dealers coming from Menotomy [Arlington], Newtowne [Cambridge] and Charlestown to the wharfs in what is now Union Square. It was also the route of the British retreat in April 1775.

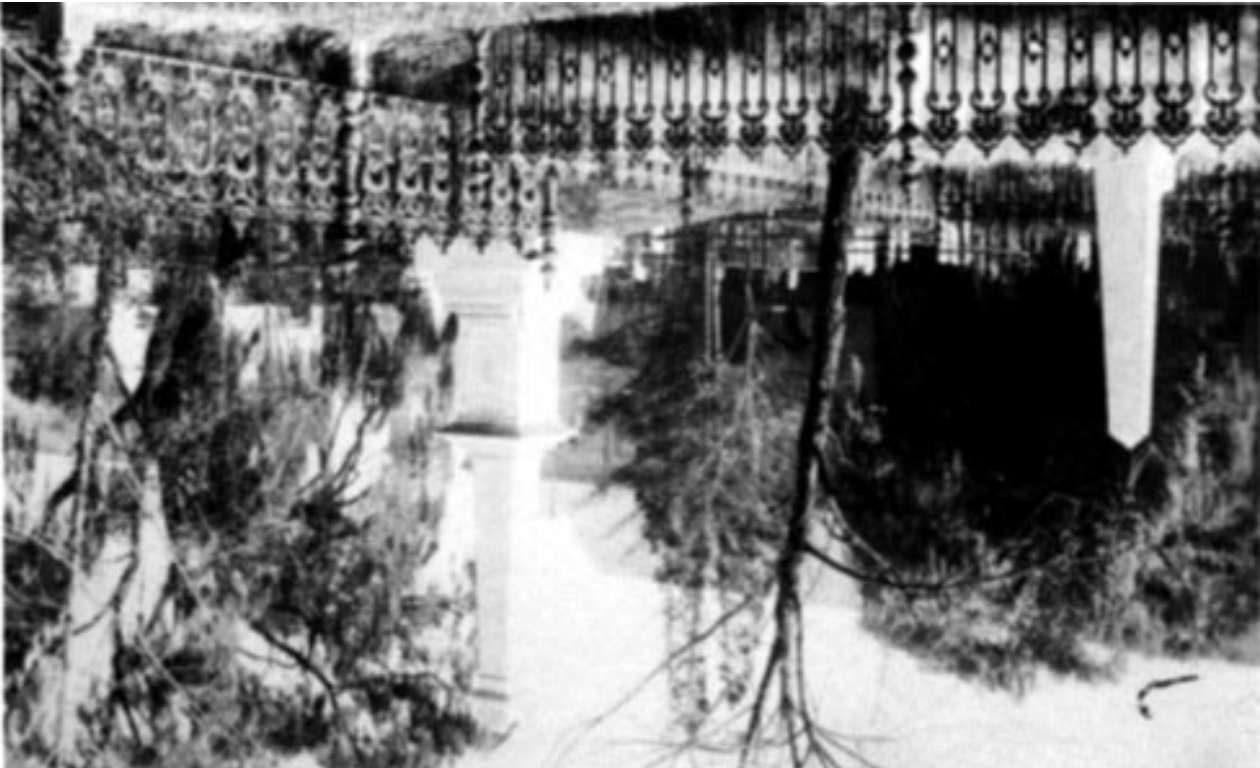
WHAT’S IN A NAME?

In 1892, the Somerville Improvement Society successfully petitioned the City to take control of the cemetery. At that time, the City undertook many improvements, including a new iron fence along Somerville Avenue.

Though it was originally intended as a private burial ground, friends and neighbors were often buried there with permission from the owners. Historic documents refer to the burial lots being about 16 feet square, which is the size of the Civil War Soldiers Monument plot.

In the mid 1800s, the town buried all its paupers there, resulting in an estimated 1,800 persons thought to be “buried in that little lot of land.” In 1892, it was reported that in the rear of the cemetery most of the graves were unmarked.

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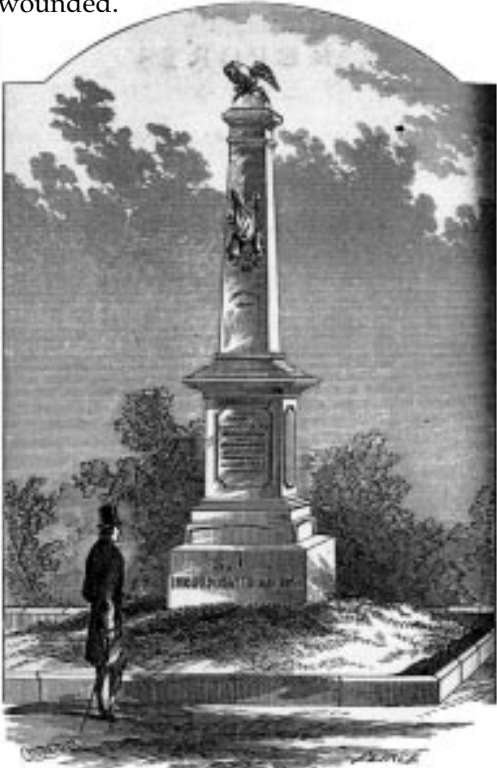
Civil War Soldiers Monument and the once extensive iron family plot fencing, c1875 (Beyond the Neck)

While this historic gem includes a collection of 155 grave markers, many with beautiful engravings, it is apparent that some have been lost. The cemetery was designated as a Local Historic District and listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1988. Additional burials have not been allowed in the cemetery since it has been listed.

1893 entrance gate and fence at Somerville Avenue, one of the oldest surviving wrought iron fences in the City



CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS MONUMENT
Milk Row Cemetery was the only burial ground in the community at the time of the Civil War. Erected in the summer of 1863 with the contributions of citizens, this tall marble memorial is thought to be the first soldiers monument in the country to honor those who died in the Civil War. Enoch Robinson, locksmith and builder of the Round House on Atherton Street, donated the plot for the monument. Overall, 1,135 men from Somerville fought in the war effort. They participated in battles like Bull Run, Wilderness, Spottsylvania and Appomattox to name a few. The names of 68 Somerville men who were killed in battle or died from wounds or sickness during their service are inscribed on the four faces of the marble shaft. Another 250 were wounded.



Civil War Soldiers Monument
(1864 Town of Somerville Annual Report)

Somerville is fortunate that its oldest cemetery still exists intact. Due to the unique historic significance of Milk Row Cemetery, visitors should be aware of several issues:

- Free public tours are periodically scheduled. Enjoy Somerville’s heritage!
- Gravestone rubbings are not permitted, because they can damage the stones, which are truly irreplaceable historic artifacts.
- Please do not sit or lean on tombs or gravestones, since they could injure you, or shift, fall over or break.
- No dog-walking, skate-boarding, roller blading, picnicking or other potentially damaging activities within the cemetery are allowed. The consumption of alcoholic beverages is not permitted.

Please report any mischevious behavior, vandalism or other relevant issues to the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission.

THE FUTURE

With a preservation plan in place, it is hoped that conservation and other improvement activities will soon follow. A Friends of the Cemetery Group is forming and seeking participants. Please call the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (617-625-6600x2500) for more information. Contributions to aid this important historic undertaking can be made to the Milk Row Cemetery Fund at the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission.

DOROTHY A. KELLY GAY, MAYOR



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A BRIEF GUIDE TO
MILK ROW CEMETERY
SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

ESTABLISHED 1804

with

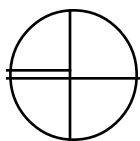
a brief historic overview of the cemetery and the Civil War Soldiers Monument,

brief descriptions of some of the significant people buried in the cemetery,

some gravestone facts

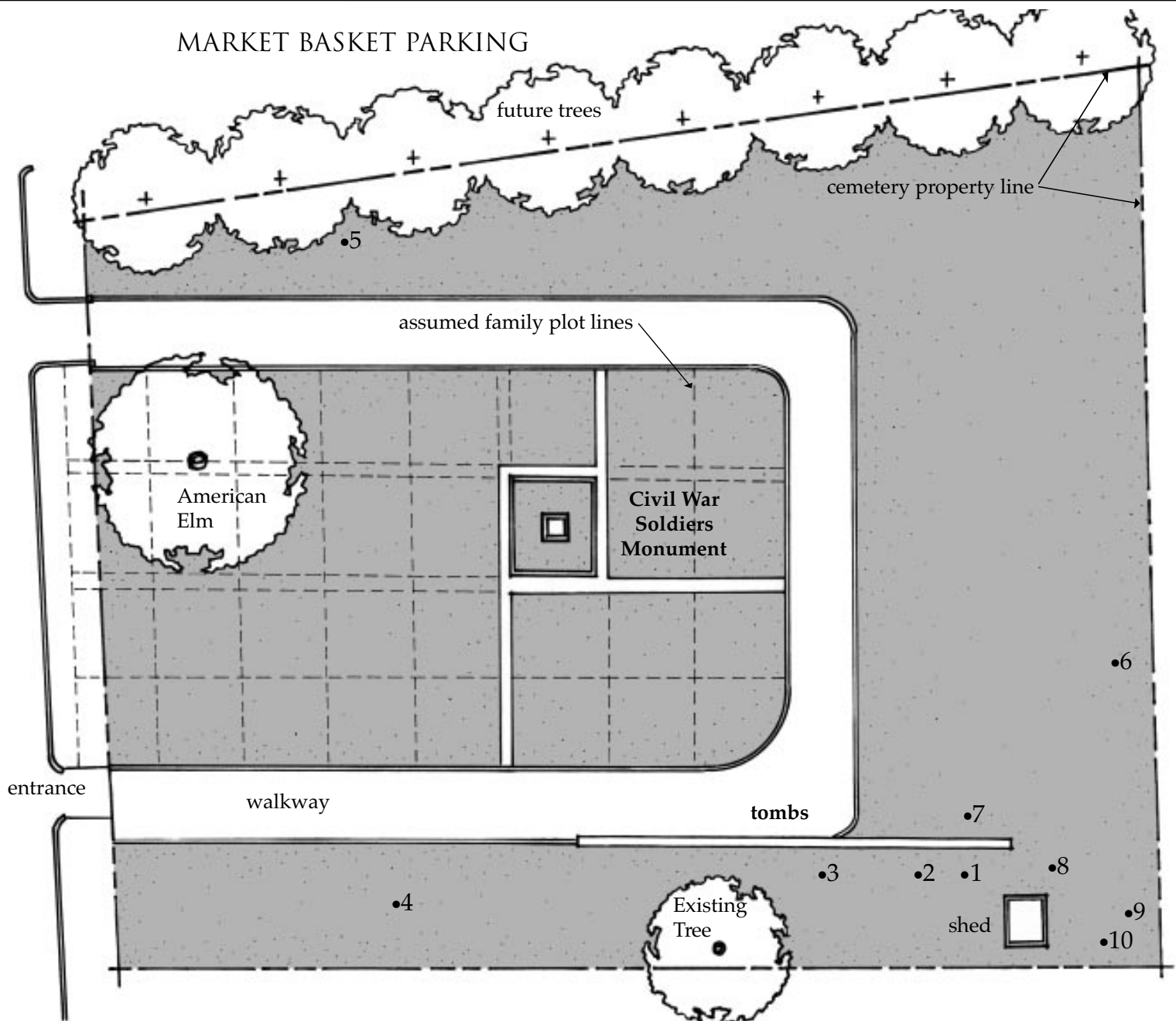
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guidelines for use



NORTH

S O M E R V I L L E A V E N U E



MILK ROW CEMETERY PLAN

SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE BURIED IN MILK ROW CEMETERY

- The vault tombs located in the southwest corner contain the earliest burials in the cemetery. In 1947, tomb 5 temporarily housed the bodies of repatriated dead of World War II before they were buried elsewhere.
1. Samuel Tufts [d1805], was the original owner of the farmland that the cemetery was built on and was responsible for the care of 2 local schools 'beyond the neck' in 1781. (tomb)
 2. Timothy Tufts [d1805], participated in the Revolutionary War skirmish with the British on their return from Concord in April 1775, one of the 5 original owners of the cemetery. (tomb)
 3. Samuel Cutter, Lt. [date unknown], Revolutionary War veteran, was responsible for the care of 2 local schools 'beyond the neck' with Samuel Tufts in 1781. (tomb)
 4. Nathaniel Hawkins, Esq. [d1858], was Trustee of Charlestown Free Schools in 1793, one of 5 original owners of the cemetery. (marble)
 5. Thomas B. LaCount [b1822-d1876], relative of Eugene LaCount who was the creator of the Sunday School seminars called LaCount classes, or adult bible classes, which are still taught today in Methodist congregations. (granite)
 6. Widow Anna Rand [d1831], whose family moved to Somerville in 1740 and became large land owners. In April of 1775, she ran to Samuel Tufts, who was busy making bullets in his basement at the time, to alert him that the British had marched down Somerville Avenue. She had been out in the late hours checking on her freshly slaughtered pig when she saw the British. Widow Rand was related through marriage to John Stone, one of the original 5 cemetery owners. (slate)
 7. Mary [d1876] and Emiline [d1846] Dane, wife and daughter of Osgood, a prominent Somerville resident, lived in the oldest extant house on Somerville Ave (#461). Presentday Granite Street was the road leading to the Dane's slate quarry. It is unknown whether Osgood is also buried in the cemetery. (marble) (Emiline's marker is missing.)
 8. A British soldier, killed during the Battle of Milk Row on April 19, 1775. The bones, found elsewhere c1850, were buried by Osgood Dane in the lower part of cemetery near the end of the line of tombs. While later building a wall there, Mr. Dane found the bones and reburied them. (approximate location, no marker)
 9. Samuel Kent [b1760-d1835], born in Charlestown, one of the 5 original owners of the cemetery. (marble)
 10. Phineas Howe [d1852], born in Norway ME, graduated from Brown University, studied theology in Newton and Halle Germany, and was chosen as the first pastor of First Baptist Society in Somerville. He died 4 months later. (marble)

GRAVESTONE FACTS

The deterioration of gravestones is becoming increasingly evident. Stone is subject to deterioration by natural weathering and atmospheric pollution. Porous stones like marble are more subject to the effects of weathering than nonporous stones like granite.

SLATE: These stones were the predominant material used for grave markers through the 17th,

18th and early 19th centuries. Shaped like a doorway, they suggest passage from this world to the next. Smaller footstones were often used to further demarcate the limits of a grave site. Headstones and footstones in combination suggest a bed, or final resting place.



Slate marker

Some of these stones have survived in good condition. Slate's relatively smooth surface does not absorb much water and is less affected by acid rain deposition than marble. The incised lettering and low relief carving on slate is often still quite clear. However, many of these stones often show some degree of delamination, due to moisture seeping in between the bedding planes or layers of stone.

MARBLE AND LIMESTONE: These stones came into use during the 1810s and remained very popular through the 1870s. Marble has not endured as well as the earlier slate markers because it is very susceptible to acid deposition and other pollution damage. Most of the marble markers have lost surface detail due to acid rain and other weathering.



Marble marker & granite base

ZINC: These markers are an example of a controversial late 19th century material called "white bronze." Although manufacturers promised better durability than marble, zinc markers were prohibited in many cemeteries because they were perceived as "cheap and faddish."



Zinc marker

Zinc could be cast to take very fine artistic detail and lettering. The excellent condition of the zinc markers in many cemeteries more than a century later supports the manufacturers' promises.

GRANITE: During the 1870s and 1880s the use of granite increased because of improved quarrying and stone carving equipment. Now the standard for grave markers, granite is relatively impervious [even more than slate] and endures quite well in outdoor environments. It is the hardest and most stable grave marker material in general use.